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ABSTRACT

The Interface Alaska Multifunctional Resource Center developed a model for training Native American language teachers to effectively teach Native languages. The model provides Native American paraprofessional language teachers with basic knowledge of classroom techniques and effective teaching strategies. The training introduces the Total Physical Response (TPR) Approach and the Natural Approach as the primary teaching methods to be used by Native American language teachers. These approaches are orally-based, meaning that they develop language from the smallest oral components of the language to eventual conversational and technical fluency. The first training session addresses the affective domain of teaching and learning and the emotional aspects of language loss. The second session establishes a theoretical base by presenting teachers with selected theories of first- and second-language acquisition. This session also introduces Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. The third session focuses on teachers forming a rationale for their involvement in the Native language preservation program. The goal is for teachers to make a long-term commitment to language acquisition and maintenance. During the fourth session, teachers are introduced to whole language, sheltered language, accelerated learning, Total Physical Response Approach, the Natural Approach, and cooperative learning, and each of these methods is then related to teaching language through an oral-based approach. The last session focuses on lesson-plan building, curriculum development, and materials development. (LP)

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A Model for Promoting Native American Language Preservation and Teaching[1]

ED 395 736

Introduction

"Are you an English speaker?" Says a school administrator to a person walking down a street.

"Yep, ah sho' am." The person replies.

"Good! We don't have anyone to teach English at the school. You're the one we've been looking for. Come and teach English for us."

"Don't mind if I do," Replies the person, and off that person goes to teach English at the local school.

While the above scenario may not happen in reality where the English language is concerned, it is a scenario, with variations, that occurs in many Native American language development programs, except that the players are usually administrators of Native American language programs. The administrators select someone to teach the Native American language simply on the basis of fluency. While fluency is an essential qualification for all Native American language teachers, the ability to teach that fluency to students is equally important. To counteract the result of the scenario illustrated in the introduction, which usually contributed to program failure, the staff at Interface Alaska Multifunctional Resource Center (MRC) 16 developed a model aimed at providing Native American language teachers with the necessary classroom knowledge to effectively teach their languages.

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The Issues

This model was born out of frustration with the process to select Native American language teachers and with the lack of appropriate training for them. There are many fluent speakers who are also effective teachers of their languages; this model is not directed at them. There are also many fluent speakers teaching their languages who know nothing about classroom management, teaching methods, or develop appropriate practices. It is this group of people for whom the model was created. Many conditions and situations contribute to the development of this model.

The model was developed primarily because too many Native American language development programs fail because they are usually staffed with paraprofessionals. Many of these paraprofessionals have little or no training in how to teach their languages.

[1]This model was developed by the Interface Alaska Bilingual Multifunctional Resource Center 16 staff and consultants, Richard E. Littlebear, Director. The information was compiled and written by Dr. R. E. Littlebear and edited by Dr. Alicia Martinez.

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Secondly, it was developed because often state certification processes may not include certification for people who have special skills, such as fluency in a Native American language or knowledge of a Native American culture. This then does not encourage institutions of higher learning to have a program for Native American language instruction.

Thirdly, it was developed because some of these teachers are older, have had less schooling, are more traditional, may not have access to teacher preparation programs, or may simply not have the academic or economic resources to return to school for additional training.

Fourthly, the model provides Native American language teachers with a foundation of the skills and knowledge that they could add to their language fluency and cultural knowledge and make them effective teachers of their own languages.

It was developed to eliminate program failure because, often when Native American language programs fail, they lose advocates in the school and in the community. Consequently, it takes the passage of time to regain advocates. In the meantime, many elders will have journeyed on, taking with them their cultural and language knowledge.

This model is just a stop-gap measure. It does not take the place of a full-scale teacher training program. It is designed to provide Native American language teachers some knowledge of classroom teaching, language teaching, and other effective teaching strategies.

This model does not teach the language; however, a language teaching model can be developed locally from this first model. Training and continued education have to be central to any Native language development program, especially if that program hopes to be successful.

Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach

This whole training process is designed to introduce and expand upon the Total Physical Response (TPR) Approach and The Natural Approach as the primary teaching methods to be used by the Native American language teachers. These approaches are orally-based, meaning that they develop language from the smallest oral components of the language to eventual conversational and technical fluency. These approaches are easily transportable from one language to another. Even though they require much preparation and constant application, they do not need the in-depth preparation demanded by regular teacher preparation courses. Most importantly, both approaches require fluent speakers of the Native American language. On the other hand, if a Native American language teacher prefers to use other methods, they are free to do so. In so doing, though, methods selected must teach the very basic sounds of the language on an oral basis.

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In implementing this model, the TPR Approach is introduced as part of the "Ice-Breaker" section of the first day's presentations. Five commands are initially introduced and they are practiced before every refreshment break, before the noon meal, and just before the end of the day's session throughout the duration of the training.

This use of the TPR Approach provides immediate application of a powerful language teaching method for the Native American language teachers. It is also included throughout because it gives the Native American language teacher a sense of the anxiety and uncertainty that their students are experiencing as they go about acquiring and learning their own Native American languages.

Background Information

To backup somewhat, before the model is actually discussed, some background material must be provided. One of the dialogues that the director of the Interface Alaska MRC 16 has been involved in for the past 15 or so years concerns Native American language preservation. [This essay will use "language preservation" to encompass all the other phrases like "language rejuvenation," "language conservation," "language maintenance," which focus on the perpetuation of languages. The term "Native American" will also be used simply because the issues discussed herein also refer to Alaska Natives and Hawaiian Natives]. At any rate, this dialogue that the director has been involved in has to do with the very evident fact that Native Americans are losing their languages. This dialogue has been just that: a dialogue. The topic of language death has been "dialogued" to death. Those who are serious about preserving their languages must act now. They have to start tape-recording and video-taping their elders, to begin developing curriculum for language development and content area instruction, and begin comprehensive, college-credit training programs. Whatever action is taken, it must emanate from the Native American cultures whose language is to be preserved.

At Interface Alaska MRC 16, the staff took a look at how Native American language teachers are trained, if they are trained at all, about how to teach their languages. To overcome that frustration that was previously mentioned, the Interface Alaska MRC 16 decided to teach Native American language teachers how to teach their languages to slow or even stop the loss of languages that is occurring at an alarmingly high and accelerating rate. This is what will be outlined in the following narrative.

The Model

This model is designed to address topics that enable Native American language teachers to teach their languages. It has been used at

four different locations: Ketchikan and Galena in Alaska and at Lame Deer and Busby in Montana.

The basic format for the model entails a 7.5 hour day lasting five days. It can be expanded or contracted, depending on the time constraints of the local program. This model takes a Native American language teacher from the affective domain, to the theoretical, to the mission statement development, to the introduction of classroom strategies, and finally to the practical application of all the previous topics.

The First Session: the affective domain and emotions

This session addresses the affective domain of teaching and learning. It also addresses the emotional aspects of language loss by presenting topics on the cycle of grief, the long-term effects of deprivation of land and culture, and positive self and cultural concepts. Along with the latter two topics, relevant activities were introduced and applied for the benefit of the Native American language teachers so that they could use these activities in their classrooms. There are also people who speak about what it means to speak a Native American language, and what it means to be a Native American and not to be able to speak a Native American language.

At this session, five commands are also introduced using the TPR Approach. These commands along with other vocabulary that will be added later on will be continued throughout the training process.

The Second Session: building a theoretical base

The second session established a theoretical base for the Native American language teachers by presenting them with the selected theories of first and second language acquisition. This theoretical base focused on the writings of Jim Cummins, James Asher, Steven Krashen, Lily Wong-Fillmore, and Tracy Terrell. All of these researchers produced classroom oriented information and theories. They are used because, if the Native American tribes are going to abdicate their responsibilities of teaching their languages and cultures to the schools, then the schools will have to devise strategies that actually teach students to become conversationally proficient in their own languages.

This session also dealt with Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, BICS and CALP respectively. Also discussed was language acquisition and language learning and the differences between these two.

The Third Session: forming a personal or group rationale

This third session centers around forming a rationale as to why each of the Native American language teachers are in the language preservation program. The reason for this topic is to make the Native

American language teachers think about why they are really in the program. This is to help set them firmly as to why they are in the program. The topics from the first two sessions will provide them with information to help them begin formulating their own personal rationale.

The reason for rationale-forming is that too often when Native American language teachers are asked why they are in a language preservation program, their rationale goes only as deep as their immediate economic needs: it provides a check. While this is a justifiable rationale in its own right, it does not speak of long-term commitment to the language program, nor does it prioritize for the language teacher the need for continued education and training. It does not speak to the need for constantly honing their teaching skills. Having a shallow rationale for being a part of a language preservation program often leads to the failure of that program because a person who is not committed will abandon the preservation program when a better paying job becomes available.

The Fourth Session: classroom methods

In this session, the Native American language teachers are introduced to whole language, sheltered language, accelerated learning, Total Physical Response Approach, The Natural Approach, and cooperative learning. Just by the sheer range of classroom management topics involved in this session, all are necessarily just introductions. This session presents the above topics to acquaint the Native American language teachers with classroom management skills. Each of these topics are in harmony with teaching language by an oral-based approach. The linguistic structure of many Native American languages demands that more than simple, discrete, individual vocabulary word lists be taught. Native American languages have been characterized as being "polysynthetic" languages, which means that many elements are pulled together, usually around a verb, to produce coherent meaning. In the meantime, some of those words that have been taught in vocabulary lists often disappear completely. The whole language approach lends itself to teaching Native American languages as whole phrases, clauses, or sentences and presents the learning of those languages in context. Accelerated learning techniques take advantage of the readily available, culturally embedded stories and songs to teach the language, which is one of their original purposes anyhow. The sheltered language method acquaints the students with those words, phrases, clauses, sentences that they will be learning and it teaches about them in preparation for the students to actually begin using them in context. Cooperative learning techniques use another culturally embedded value, sharing, to enable the Native American language teacher to manage the classroom.

The Fifth Session: practical applications

At this session, the presenters focus on lesson plan building, curriculum development and materials development. The various kinds of curriculum — such as the integrated, the parallel, and the thematic — are discussed. The presenters also introduce scoping, sequencing, expanding, or contracting curriculum that has been developed. These concepts are such essential classroom skills that the presenters introduce them because the Native American language teachers may also have to be the curriculum developers for their programs.

Follow-up: the aftermath of training

In later follow-up sessions, the presenters will go into depth concerning any of the above topics. The Native American language teachers will decide on the topics they want training. The whole idea behind this training model is to tailor the training process to meet the needs of the Native American language teachers. Embedded in the whole process is the flexibility to address other topics that the Native American language teachers need to discuss rather than providing "canned" or "prefabricated" training. Those kind of presentations usually do not address the immediate needs of the Native American language teachers.

Conclusion

Finally, it is hoped that the dialogue that the director has been involved in for the past 15 years will be translated into action. Native Americans are aware that they are losing their languages and cultures but it is useless for them to continuously lament these losses, to continuously blame the schools, the government, the churches, and the mass media for these losses. Native Americans know these organizations are to blame, but they must further realize that these organizations are going to do little if anything to languages and cultures.

It is up to Native Americans to preserve their languages and cultures. To help reinforce what the schools are trying to do, Native Americans should just talk their languages everywhere, with everyone all the time.

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